

# Respiratory illness in Residential and Aged Care Facilities

## Collection of nose and throat swabs

Take nose and throat swabs from residents with acute symptoms (onset within the preceding 48 hours) of a respiratory illness. Ideally collect swabs from **four to six residents**. We recommend the treating doctor requests a respiratory multiplex PCR to be done by the laboratory (this will include Influenza A/B and other respiratory viruses).

Inform the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) which laboratory provider(s) your residential care facility uses.

### Equipment:

- swabs
- personal protective equipment
  - single use face mask
  - protective eyewear
  - gloves

## Procedure

Take swabs from the resident's nose and throat as directed below. The requirements of different laboratories may vary and staff should be trained in the procedure, collection, storage and courier requirements of the relevant laboratory guidelines. The information below is provided as a guide only.

### 1. Perform hand hygiene then don mask, protective eyewear and gloves

#### Nose swabs

- Tilt the resident's head back gently with one hand and steady the resident's chin.
- With the other hand, insert the swab horizontally (gently pushing the swab directly back rather than up) into the resident's nostril approximately 2-3cm<sup>1</sup> Rub vigorously against the internal surface of the nose to ensure the swab contains cells as well as mucus from the nose.
- Withdraw the swab from the nostril and return to the specimen tube.



#### Throat swab

- Ask the resident to open his/her mouth and stick out their tongue.
- Use a wooden spatula to press the tongue downward to the floor of the mouth.
- Firmly swab both of the tonsillar arches and the posterior naso-oropharynx, without touching the sides of the mouth.
- The swab should be thoroughly wet with throat secretions.
- Remove the swab and return directly into the specimen tube.



<sup>1</sup> Communicable Diseases Network Australia 2017, *Guidelines for the prevention, control and public health management of influenza outbreaks in residential care facilities in Australia*, Australian Government, Canberra

## **2. Remove gloves, protective eyewear and mask**

## **3. Perform hand hygiene**

### **Specimen labelling, storage and transport**

- Label the specimen
- Place the specimen in a biohazard bag
- Complete the request form (request a multiplex respiratory PCR)
- Specimens should preferably be sent to the laboratory on the day of collection or the following day
- The department will liaise with the facility to determine the most efficient option for processing swabs. This could be a primary laboratory or relevant public health laboratory (VIDRL). Telephone the Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Section on 1300 65 11 60.